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ABSTRACT

A review of the status of English language instruction in northern India (the states of Haryana, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, and Chandigarh UT) provides an overview of the role of English in the society in general and outlines the status of English use and instruction in the educational system at all levels (preprimary, elementary, secondary, higher, vocational, adult, and teacher education). The report also covers the characteristics and training of English language instructors, the type and availability of instructional materials, educational administration and planning in relation to English teaching, English instruction outside the educational system, British and other international support, commercial opportunities related to English instruction, creative writing, language research, and other sources of information. It is concluded that the main strengths of English language teaching are that the role of English in commerce, academia, and interstate and international communication is strong. The main weakness is in the unsatisfactory curriculum, instruction, and testing of English in the educational system, which has a tendency to favor literature over spoken language and gives little exposure to native speech. (MSE)

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ENGLISH TEACHING PROFILE

Country: India: northern region (The states of Haryana, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Chandigarh UT)

Date: April 1986

1. ROLE AND STATUS OF ENGLISH

The role of English in north India has to be seen in the larger context of the literacy level of the region as the extent of literacy often indicates the degree of prestige which is attached to the competent use of English. The level of literacy in Chandigarh is as high as 64.68% while that in Haryana is 35.84%. The level in Himachal Pradesh is 42.48% and in Punjab 40.74%.

Although almost all official work in Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Haryana is done in the local languages, English is still important for inter-state communications; newspapers and magazines (in English) of local interest are not uncommon in Chandigarh (where English is the prescribed official language) though they are less easy to find in other regions. In all parts of this region - as in all parts of India - one is likely to find a small number of people (doctors, journalists, administrators, army officers) who are almost bilingual. These people use English to a great extent in everyday life, and they sometimes use the language in creative writing.

Most of the big cities in this region have bookshops which sell popular English paperbacks published outside India and a variety of national newspapers and magazines in English. Some of the bigger cinemas also 'bring in' British and American films, though this (for administrative reasons) is much less frequent now than it used to be ten years ago.

Mention needs to be made here of the language varieties which have emerged as a result of the contact between English, the local language and/or Hindi (if

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the local language is not Hindi). Oral and written communication in English is characterized by frequent code-switching and is usually in a markedly indigenous variety of the language. Communication in the local language, among city-dwellers and the literate, is liberally sprinkled with words of English origin. Indeed, it is as common in urban areas of this part of north India as in the others, to find hoardings and shop signs written in Hindi but comprising almost entirely of words of English origin.

2. ENGLISH WITHIN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

English is the medium of instruction in:

expensive, privately run public schools often modelled on the English-type public school; very few in number and usually highly regarded

'convent schools' - also usually expensive, run by various catholic orders

central government schools (Kendriya Vidyalaya) meant primarily to cater to children of civil servants and administrators and funded by the central government

a few 'model' schools funded by the state governments; more are likely to emerge in the next few years.

It should, however, be noted that English-medium schools are very few in comparison to the vast numbers of state-run schools where English is just one subject among many others at the middle and high school levels.

Pre-primary and primary education

A recent Government of India survey shows that 73% of the educational institutions in India are primary schools; of these, a little less than 5% (about 25,000) are situated in the region under description.

English is taught for six to nine hours as a compulsory subject in non-English medium schools. Much of this time is spent on teaching the language; literature, usually of the traditional kind, is introduced at the secondary level as a means of teaching the language.

Secondary education

There are three major options amongst the patterns that can be followed in deciding on the duration of English teaching in school. If English is the medium of instruction, it is still taught as a subject for six to twelve periods every week for a ten years; if it is a second language, it is usually taught for six to twelve periods for either eight or six years. The choices available to a school are obviously guided by the examination board to which the school is affiliated and the local availability of English teachers.

There have been some attempts to make the quality and quantity of English language teaching in schools more uniform throughout India and this is likely to become a major educational objective.

Tertiary education

There are, in this region, just over 300 colleges (about 6% of the national total) and nine universities. The medium of instruction at the collegiate and university levels is English except in the University of Kurukshetra (Haryana) where undergraduate arts and science courses are taught in Hindi.

In addition to being used as the medium of instruction, English is taught as a compulsory subject for six to eight hours in the week. Most undergraduate students are expected to do English for the first two years of their three-year course. Courses in English contain a considerable amount of traditional literature. Postgraduate degree courses in English are exclusively literary.

Vocational training

Only two universities (Panjab, Punjabi) in this region offer vocational training. However, with the current Government of India interest in the vocationalization of education, there is likely to be a considerable development in this area in the future. It is difficult to guess the extent to which English will be used in such training.

Correspondence courses

The universities of Himachal Pradesh, Kurukshetra, Panjab and Punjabi offer correspondence courses in English language and literature to undergraduate students; postgraduate courses in English literature can be done by correspondence from all these universities except Kurukshetra.

Non-formal and adult education

This is a slowly developing priority as non-formal education is a recent concept.

The non-formal educational schemes that exist in universities are run by students who work in the National Service Scheme. English does not appear to have a significant role to play in this area as the primary goal is literacy in the first language.

Teacher training

Short in-service teacher-training courses (two days to two weeks) are run by the various state institutes of education (administrative bodies responsible for primary and secondary education in the state); longer courses (four to nine months) are conducted at the Regional Institute of English in Chandigarh.

Pre-service training is offered at teacher training colleges affiliated to the various universities. Pre-service training usually involves intensive training in the teaching of at least three subjects, one of which is normally English. Teacher training colleges, which provide such training, tend to advocate structuralist practices in language teaching.

Courses in TESL/TEFL are postgraduate options at the University of Kurukshetra. These courses attempt to incorporate some of the ideas that have developed within British ELT studies.

Professional associations and organizations

There are no professional associations and organizations.

Others

Examinations at the high school level are conducted by the state boards of education (in state-run, non-English medium schools) and by the all-India boards of education in private/English-medium schools. The all-India boards are usually either the Indian Schools Certificate Examination Board or the Central Board of Secondary Education.

These authorities also prescribe the textbooks and/or syllabuses to be followed. Courses and examinations at the college level are prescribed by the board of the university to which the college is affiliated.

No British-based examinations are taken; there is no inspection of English teaching; there is no ESP; and there are no officially sponsored programmes for the teaching of English to adults other than at the tertiary level.

Although English plays a very important role within the educational system, the language achievement of students is less than might be expected as the demands of the syllabus and examination systems, and the inadequacy of library facilities frequently drive students to the extensive - and, often enough, exclusive - use of cribs and translations.

3. TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

There is a shortage of trained teachers in this region. The staff, at all levels, are Indians.

The minimum qualification required for a teacher of English at middle school is a first degree, and at high school a Master's degree. All schoolteachers are required to possess a BEd degree. College lecturers are expected to have a first class or a high second class Master's degree and an MPhil or a PhD.

There are about forty colleges of education in this region and pre-service specialization in ELT is chosen by most of the 300 or more students who pass through them each year. The courses are usually highly theoretical and advocate the structural method. The only in-service training is provided by the Regional Institute of English which caters to about a hundred teachers each year. In-service training for college/ university lecturers is available on an all-India basis at the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL) in Hyderabad.

While the structure of the educational system at all levels is meant to accommodate and encourage teachers who seek in-service training in India, it is usually very difficult for teachers to get away from their teaching for more than a couple of weeks. There is, consequently, insufficient in-service training. There are, occasionally, month-long 'contact programmes' during the vacations for teachers who have undertaken a correspondence course in ELT from the CIEFL, Hyderabad or in English Literature from one of the universities.

Few teachers attend short ELT and literature summer courses in Britain; they do so at their own initiative and with encouragement only from the British Council offices in Ubdia. The cost of international travel (even for those who

receive support from the Hornby Trust) is generally prohibitive. There are a few British Council administered scholarships available for teachers who would like to do a year's course in ELT in Britain, but there is a great deal of competition for these.

There are no professional organizations for teachers of English.

4. MATERIALS SUPPORT

Schools and institutions do not suffer from a serious shortage of textbooks though extra reading material might well be in short supply. Graded textbooks, produced nationally by the CIEFL, Hyderabad and the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), Delhi, are used in most of the state-run schools. These books are based on a structural syllabus. English-medium schools follow the syllabus prescribed by the board to which they are affiliated; there is greater scope for choice in the textbooks used in English-medium schools than there is in the other schools.

The textbooks prescribed by the various universities for undergraduate English are many and change from time to time. They tend to reflect a general preference for pre-modern English literature.

Tapes and films are rarely used because they are thought to be expensive and are not easily available.

There are no large-scale projects to translate English literature into local languages.

5. EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION IN RELATION TO ENGLISH TEACHING

Policy and administrative decisions relating to school education are taken by the departments of English in individual states; these decisions usually fall within the framework of the more general policy outlined by the Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resources Development (formerly, Ministry of Education) of the Government of India. The Government of India's stated policy - generally referred to as the 'three-language formula' - places the teaching of English just below the teaching of the mother-tongue and above the teaching of the third language (usually a modern Indian language, which is not the mother-tongue of the learner). The options that are available to the states are numerous and there is much flexibility in the way in which the formula is implemented not only by the state departments of education but also by the institutions under their control. State-run schools are visited by state-appointed inspectors; this is, however, often a mere formality.

The University Grants Commission (UGC), an autonomous body set up by the Ministry of Human Resources Development, has overall responsibility for funding universities and maintaining standards of teaching. Every year, two or three universities in the region are given funds for seminars/workshops in English; most of these seminars/workshops, however, tend to be literary affairs. Individual universities are responsible for decisions about the quality and quantity of English they will provide in their courses. There is no system of inspection at the university level, though the UGC occasionally sends out 'visiting teams' to report on universities. The UGC recommends that English be taught as a library language, i.e. for academic purposes.

Teacher training colleges are usually a part of a university's faculty of education.

6. DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING OF THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

Planning for schools in the states is done by the state institutes of education; these often draw from the National Council of Educational Research and Training.

[For more on national planning and development, please see the ELT Profile for south India.]

7. ENGLISH OUTSIDE THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Some privately-run English language schools purport to teach 'conversational English' within ridiculously short periods of time. These profit-making institutes have little academic credibility but enjoy a certain degree of popularity amongst job-seekers, etc.

8. BRITISH SUPPORT FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

There are no British staff of any category engaged in the teaching of English in this part of India. The British Council, however, periodically makes available for short periods of time the services of British specialists in ELT to universities and teacher-training institutions. The British Council also provides support in the form of ODA/BPP book presentations of the value of £1,500-2,000 to two or three institutions in this region, each year. British textbooks and teaching materials are widely used and British Council staff are usually requested to advise on purchase of ELT materials.

9. AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

None.

10. OTHER AGENCY SUPPORT

Please see ELT Profile for south India.

11. COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

Please see ELT Profile for south India.

12. CREATIVE WRITING

There are societies and associations for creative writing in local languages in this region, but none of any significance dedicated to British writers; the only well-established prize awarded to Indian writing in English is the Sahitya Akademi award given by the National Academy of Letters (Delhi). There are small publishing companies but most of them are local. Publishers like Macmillan, Longman, Penguin, Oxford University Press, Sterling, and McGraw-Hill are all fairly active but work with Indian collaborators and representatives.

13. CURRENT RESEARCH

The universities of Panjab, Punjabi, Kurukshetra, Himachal Pradesh, Rohtak and Guru Nanak Dev provide for MPhil/PhD level research in English literature; university libraries are, however, usually inadequate. There is practically no significant research in progress relevant to the teaching of English language and literature. None of these universities has links with a British university in the field of English studies.

No more than three or four people go to Britain each year under either the scholarship or the visitorship scheme. There were only three specialist visits to universities in this region last year; the level of activity has decreased considerably on account of the political problems in Punjab and Chandigarh which made it difficult for the British Council to obtain entry permits for British specialists.

14. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

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15. GENERAL STATEMENT

The main strengths of the present ELT situation are:

knowledge of English still being considered a prerequisite for a good job and better prospects

the role of English as the most important library language in academic use

the usefulness of English in inter-state communication in administration

the social status English gives those who are competent in its use

recognition of English as an international language

recognition of the literary heritage of English.

The main weaknesses arise from the qualitatively unsatisfactory way in which English is handled within the greater part of the educational system:

courses are conservative and old-fashioned; methodologies are unimaginative; and testing is stereotyped and often uninformative

there is a shortage of teachers trained specifically for the teaching of English

neglect of oral/aural skills

there is a strong bias towards the teaching of English literature even when students are incapable of using the language spontaneously in the least demanding of situations; teachers of literature at university level are not trained in teaching language through literature

there is little exposure to native models of English.

[Please see the ELT Profile for south India also.]